

A high-rise murderer kicks off *John Dugdale's* choice

## Mayhem in the city

THRILLERS  
ROUNDUP



Lifts are plummeting across New York in Linwood Barclay's **Elevator Pitch** (HQ £20), causing deaths and panic – and a PR crisis for mayor “Dick” Headley, a Trump-like businessman. While the NYPD and FBI hunt for the saboteurs, as well as a link between the skyscrapers affected, Barbara Matheson, a journalist consistently critical of Headley, conducts her own investigation and is alternately wooed and harassed by the mayor's aides.

Best known for noirish suburban tales, Barclay manages the switch here to metropolitan mayhem with aplomb, juggling venal big-city politics, far-right terrorism, hubristic architecture and the co-optation of the media with the same confidence he brings

to orchestrating his sizeable ensemble. One of the likely meanings of the title is that the novel itself is a sly “pitch” for a film deal, and it has all the makings of a superior disaster movie.

Sarah Lotz made a splash with *The Three*, a high-concept thriller about plane-crash survivors in four far-flung countries. She sticks to America and Ireland in **Missing Person** (Hodder £19.99), a take on the true-crime craze, which is centred on an online forum for solving cold cases called *Missing-linc.com*. Currently, its amateur gumshoes are obsessing about Teddy, a gay Irish exile killed 30 years ago. His nephew gets involved, as do *Missing-linc.com's* moderator Chris, obsessive sleuth Ellie and (unbeknown to them) Teddy's murderer, a serial killer posing as an ex-cop on their site.

Although it's a promising premise, somehow the book drags on the page – perhaps due to the way the story is told through a mix of posts, texts and conventional narration, perhaps because too little actually happens.

Fifty years after Michael

**Courtroom drama**  
Kia Abdullah



Crichton's pioneering bio-thriller *The Andromeda Strain*, its set-up – the outbreak of a deadly organism – is reworked in **Cold Storage** (HQ £12.99), the debut novel by the *Jurassic Park* and *Spider-Man* screenwriter David Koepp. Here, the threat is a sample of a fungus capable of phenomenal destruction that has been buried in a former mine. Two workers at a storage facility built above the mine sound the alarm when it goes missing; and they're soon joined by a pair of counter-bio-terror agents who had captured *Cordyceps novus* in Australia 32 years earlier and (they thought) stored it safely.

Beside its predictably fine dialogue, the book's strengths include the Stephen King-like way humour is interwoven with horror and Koepp's enthralling conjuring of the fungus, which becomes as vivid as its human co-leads. Only a slightly underpowered finale lets it down.

Jodie, a London teenager

with facial deformities, claims she was gang-raped by schoolmates in Kia Abdullah's third novel **Take It Back** (HQ £12.99). Zara, a former barrister now working at an advice centre, puts her faith in Jodie as the four accused insist she made it all up. But as the boys are all Muslims, like Zara, the lawyer is branded a traitor to her community as the case goes to trial amid a media frenzy. Just as impressive as the courtroom drama is Abdullah's portrayal of five deftly differentiated British-Asian families, and of the relationship between two disparate women who both become isolated pariahs.

Like Marlon Brando's enemy in the film *On the Waterfront*, Cormack O'Connell is a corrupt union boss who controls a port's docks. Yet he becomes the closest thing to a good guy in Jack Flynn's **Blood in the Water** (Macmillan £14.99), in which his reign in Boston is threatened by a Malaysian heroin kingpin allied to Salvadoran narco, with a female federal agent covertly backing O'Connell. Arguably, Flynn goes for too large a cast, so that his early chapters are bewildering; but any confusion has dissipated long before an adroit showdown in which the gangsters mount an amphibious assault on a courthouse. ■



THRILLER  
OF THE  
MONTH

OUR  
TOP PICK